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GUATTARI & ITALY'S "HOT AUTUMN"

NONPOLITICS CLASS, CONSPIRATIONAL COMMUNISM, DELEUZE/GUATTARI, DETERMINATION-IN-DER-LETZTEN-INSTANZ, GUATTARI, MARXISM, MINORITY, MOLECULAR REVOLUTION

Guattari was dreaming of building a federation of regional protest movements, which could open up secondary fronts and weaken the Nation-State. Despite his extensive network of contacts, he never managed to realize this perilous project, which was located on the cusp between democratic combat and terrorist action [...] Guattari became a hero figure in Bologna. He was considered one of the essential sources of inspiration for the Italian left, and he watched the marches with the utmost delight, seeing his thoughts take shape in a social and political force. The day after the gathering, the daily and weekly press put his photo on their covers, presenting him as the founder and creator of this mobilization. Guattari had suddenly become the Daniel Cohn-Bendit of Italy.

– François Dosse, *Intersecting Lives*

As history has sometimes shown, engaging in revolution can be a perilous project. Such was the situation of the deleuzoguattarian political experiment, as well as its supposed fate as recounted by François Dosse in the epigraph above. It is our wager that in order to get a better sense of the specific ways in which the political experiment of molecular revolution succeeded and failed, we must begin with Guattari's political writing in conjunction with the movements and struggles he was engaged with at the time of their writing. As such, our inquiry is aimed to demonstrate the following thesis: by shifting the focus away from class-identity and toward the minor/minority, Deleuze and Guattari's notion of a 'molecular revolution' overcomes the limits and dangers of more orthodox images of how revolutionary praxis is defined and how it manifests itself in concrete terms. To make this argument, however, requires a consideration of the similarities and differences to traditional Marxism that are operative in Guattari's political thought. After a comparative analysis, we will then be able to see how Guattari's notions of the 'minor', and 'minority', contribute to an alternate understanding of the current possibility of revolution as being nothing other than 'molecular' in nature.

Guattari developed the notion of a 'molecular revolution' in response to his involvement in Italy's 'Hot Autumn' of 1977, as well as in response to the lessons he learned in the afterlife of '68. For Guattari, what these cycles of struggle signaled as necessary was a shift away, in both analysis and praxis, from more classical notions of collective subjectivity organized around a shared, class-based, worker, identity; and this being the specific social group that according to marxist orthodoxy, is said to occupy *the* privileged place in society from where the abolition of capital can be successfully achieved. For Guattari, instead of reiterating the centrality of the composition of class struggle according to class-based identity, revolutionary theory and praxis would be better served by avoiding (i) the strategy of organizing a revolutionary movement in terms of 'class unity' and (ii) any analysis of capital's possible overcoming that places class as *the* central category. In place of class and the composition of class struggle along a shared *worker* identity, Guattari's wager is that it would be more fruitful to substitute the category of 'class' with that of 'minority.' However, if 'minority' was to eventually supplant 'class' within Guattari's theory of revolution, it was caused by a few key reasons and political experiences. However, in order to understand the significance of Guattari's 'molecular revolution', a few things must be said regarding the concept of minority; and particularly, how it is defined and how it is used in response to specific political developments during the 1970's.

1. *Minority, Class, Politics*

First, the category of 'minority' was offered as an alternative to that of 'class' insofar as class itself was a category that did not sufficiently account for the ways in which specific sections of the global population were primed for engaging in communism as the abolition of capitalist social relations as such. When Deleuze and Guattari assert that a 'minority is defined as a non-denumerable set, however many elements it may have,'³ this means that what constitutes a minority is not a shared identity. Rather, a minority is constituted by that particular conjunction of individuals whose collective existence is defined by the possibility of abolishing all identities offered by the world of capital:

Women, nonmen, as a minority, as a nondenumerable flow or set, would receive no adequate expression by becoming elements of the majority..Nonwhites would receive no adequate expression by becoming a new yellow or black majority..Minority as a universal figure, or becoming-everybody/everything (*devenir tout le monde*).³

However, upon what basis can Guattari substitute the figure of the minority/the minor for that of class/class-identity, without jettisoning the revolutionary aspirations of a class analysis of capitalist social relations? For Guattari (as well as Deleuze) replacing class with minority is justified precisely because what defines the minor/minority is a mode of engagement with capital that eschews all attempts of trying to secure its identity *within capital itself*. This is not to say that Guattari understand the category of class as inherently fated, or as a concept whose only promise is that of securing a more equal distribution of wealth while failing to abolish the value-form, for example. But if this is so, why replace a category as central as that of class? That is, what made Guattari view this substitution of minority for class something essential and necessary for the possible of theorizing revolutionary struggle? In a word: Italy's "Hot Autumn." It would be this period of revolutionary activity in Italy, starting from the summer and fall of 1969 up through the late 70's, that would inform Guattari's thoughts regarding the form and content any future revolutionary movement *must* take. In addition to his participation (Radio Alice) and relationship to key figures (Negri, Berardi) of this moment in the country's history, Guattari found therein the existence of a mode of engaging in class struggle that could not sufficiently be theorized in terms of simple class-identity or class-belonging. Unlike its more traditional organizational counterparts (i.e. unions, parties) that remained obedient to union bosses and the Party, *Autonomia* was a form and composition of struggle that maintained close relations, "with non-industrial workers, particularly service-sector and radicalized professional workers, as well as with unpaid labor, such as the "houseworkers" (*operaie di casa*) of the *operaist* section of the women's movement, the movement of the unemployed in the South, and the university and high school students' movements."⁴

In light of this Guattari adopted a framework that now viewed all individuals relative to their position within society as having their own, specific, potential for engaging in revolutionary activity. Thus, it is no longer simply the proletariat who hold a privileged position within the circuit of value creation and capital accumulation. In light of the mutations undergone by capital at the beginning of the 1970's and into the 1980's, the struggle waged against capital can begin and organize itself from any point within capitalist totality as such. Thus it isn't just the working-class, or those who are exploited at the point of production, who are potentially partisans of the revolution. For Guattari, and beginning in the 1970's, it is *anyone anywhere* who can take up the struggle for abolishing value as the social relation that dominates and exploits every dimension of public and private life. However, what makes this a truly molecular understanding of revolution is not simply this democratization of the latent revolutionary character of more social-positions within capital. What makes a movement molecular in nature is its inclusion of those elements of society ignored, or placated, by the unions and Party leadership – a movement that includes these elements in accordance with the idea that what is required is not the progressive embetterment of the lives of workers *as workers*, of their daily life *within capital*, but rather the abolition of the identity and function of work and the worker all together. Thus, alongside the inspiration he drew from *autonomia*, Guattari's qualification of revolution as 'molecular' was also a response to what those sympathetic to *autonomia* saw as the actual, concrete, role played by both the official unions and the Italian Communist Party (PCI).

During this decade of revolutionary upheaval, and against their supposed role as advocates and representatives of working-class interests, the official workers unions and PCI continuously revealed themselves as acting according to their interest of maintaining the greatest degree of legitimacy in the eyes of the state. What was revealed in the course of Italy's 'Hot Autumn' was the way in which both unions and the PCI acted with a view toward consolidating political legitimacy at the expense of jettisoning any strategy for the abolition of work and worker identity. And this is clearest seen two key examples: Alberto Asor Rosa's 'two societies thesis' and the Moro Affair of 1978.

2. The Class That Struggles Together Stays Together

The figure of Asor Rosa, who was himself a former member of Potere Operaio and later joined the PCI in the early 70's, is important for understanding how the official channels of the Left came to betray the workers themselves precisely because it was Asor Rosa who provided the PCI with the very analysis that would come to define its relationship to the Left in general. As Jason Smith aptly summarizes: '...Alberto Asor Rosa...spoke of a deep and potentially unbridgeable cleavage in Italian society, indeed of "two societies." One society was made up of the classical workers' movement...This first society...had formed a parliamentary alliance with the center-right Christian Democrats, and, most importantly, espoused an ethos of work. The second society was composed of a complex stratification of students, the unemployed, the precariously employed, southern immigrants, proletarian youth circles, and other strays who refused this ethos of work and who even refused worker identity altogether...He argued that these strata that made up the second society were unable to assume enough distance from themselves to comprehend the PCI's strategic compromise with the center-right. The parasitic strata were, he lamented, completely absorbed by the "hard and desperate perception of their own needs."5 It would be Asor Rosa's "two societies" thesis that would serve as the basis for the PCI's strategy of representing and denouncing the extra-parliamentary Left as nothing but the violent, criminal, and opportunistic elements in society. In this way, the PCI was able to consolidate its self-image as the Party of the proletariat as not of the lumpenproletariat: 'Asor Rosa and PCI ...frame this illegibility in orthodox terms, describing it [*autonomia*] as a reformatted version of the nineteenth century's dangerous classes and their lumpen criminality.'6

Now, with this 'two societies' framework now in use, both union and Party officials had the means for policing and isolating various factions among the extra-parliamentary left. This is perhaps clearest seen in the events following the Moro Affair, which saw the criminalization of Autonomia Operaia by the PCI due to their alleged participation in the Red Brigades' kidnapping and murder of former DC prime minister Aldo Moro. "Following the Moro Affair in 1978, the overall level of repression and fear intensified throughout civil society, causing demobilization and a mass withdrawal into private life on the one hand, and the increasing resort to armed, clandestine, organized violence on the other, leaving a vulnerable minority in open political activity...Lists of suspected terrorists and sympathizers were drawn up by the unions and passed to management in the same way that the PCI called on the public to denounce anyone who seemed to be a terrorist."7 And so what began with the Fiat strike in Mirafiori in 1969, with its emergence of modes of composition that broke with what was widely accepted to be a revolutionary mode of struggle, eventually culminated in a situation whereby the unions and PCI assume the function of policing those elements of society deemed to be extremist, in order to maintain the appearance of political legitimacy. This was a situation that demonstrated both the unions and PCI's comfortability in sacrificing class struggle for an image of the existence of a reasonable, and civil, Left government. In the end, however, the failures of this strategy adopted by the unions and PCI quickly revealed themselves at the moment when, in 1979, factory workers needed them in the face of Fiat dismissing '...sixty-one of the most militant New Left and autonomist activists for "moral behavior not consistent with the well-being of the Compact" (Red Notes 1981, 71).' To make matters worse:

The unions reacted sluggishly given that some of the workers were accused of using violence during strikes and because they, like the PCI, were keen to see them expelled. With the initiative in hand, Fiat announced the redundancies of 14,500 workers in September 1980, "the biggest mass sacking in Italian history" (ibid.). A sense of profound outrage filled the working-class districts of Turin...However, the national unions were paralyzed by confusion; as well the PCI had recently ended the "Historic Compromise" pact, no longer useful to the elites, as a state of emergency with all-out repression and criminalization of the extraparlimentary left had taken its place. The rest of the Italian manufacturing industry quickly followed suit, launching a wave of mass sackings and redundancies...8

Thus, while the PCI claimed to be acting in the interests of the working-class, it was clear to Guattari that, in fact, the PCI was more interested in guaranteeing its own future electability. It is due to the ways in which parliamentary forms of organization have betrayed and further exploited the proletariat as revolutionary subject that Guattari will go on to write the following:

It is not easy to obliterate from public memory the half-dozen or so powerful swerves to the left in the past forty years, all of which ended in retreat, in compromises with bourgeois parties and a consolidation of capitalism, and all of which were followed by long periods of demoralization and lethargy among the popular forces. *While the militant base grows no stronger in its convictions and fails to expand in proportion to its enlarged audience among the parties of the left, the leadership, for its part, continues to consolidate its position, harden its views and bureaucratize itself.* Preparatory to playing a role of normalizing and defending the established order at national level (as the Italian Communist Party leadership are already doing), officials are expected to maintain discipline within the organization, and keep a close watch on anyone who looks like upsetting sympathetic outsiders. *Anything not relevant to the winning of the current election is felt to be dangerous...all creative urges...all attempts to try new methods and struggles, all unplanned desires and strategies seem to be suspect.*9

3. *Conspiratorial Communism*

If, as Dosse's epigraph suggests, Guattari imagined a federation of regional protest movements as constituting the minor subjects of his molecular revolution, it is because what constitutes minor subjectivity is precisely what was lacking from the compromises made by the PCI and labor unions: namely, the composition of a collective subject that included individuals from a wide variety of social positions – from workers to women; from students to the unemployed and the youth – in the name of abolishing work as such. If the PCI and its unions sought to wage class struggle by strengthening the proletariat on the basis of a shared, worker, identity, Minor subjectivity is the composition of a collective subject that refuses work and worker identity altogether. Guattari's concept of molecular revolution, then, takes its cue from Italy's 'Hot Autumn' since it proceeds by a refusal of work, which is tied to the aim of abolishing working class identity as such. And it is for these reasons that we can hear Guattari's statement regarding the ban of Radio Alice in 1977 as a statement delivered in a decidedly *autonomist* manner:

No more of the blackmail of poverty, the discipline of work, the hierarchical order, sacrifice, patriotism, the general good. All this has been silencing the voice of the body. All our time has always been devoted to working, eight hours' work, two hours getting there and back, then relaxing over television and family supper. As far as the police and the law are concerned anything outside this routine is depraved.¹⁰

However, if it was Italy's "Hot Autumn" that would inform Guattari's concerns regarding the failures of a movement that sought out nothing short of the abolition of work and worker-identity, it also provided Guattari with an example of how to reconceive the relationship between capital and the state for his present moment:

...would a Statist policy of stimulating production under State control...succeed in bringing back full employment, stopping inflation and restoring the confidence of investors? A 'left' government would...launch new programmes of low-cost housing, hospitals, schools, motorways, supersonic aviation, nuclear power stations and so on. But there are limitations to a policy of this kind...Suppose that...a few declining banks and corporations are taken into State control...what real difference will it make? In effect, the State will continue to come more and more under the control of modern capitalism, and once again the left will have helped to speed up the change [...] 'During the rising, ambitious phase, the State came to assume control directly or indirectly of the least profitable branches of the economy; this, for example, requiring large amount of available capital, or too large a work force...it thus ended by assuming responsibility for running and financing the general infrastructure of the capitalist economy. Private profit began a kind of parasitical growth on the great tree trunk of the State and its national industries [which resulted in] State support for private capitalism and its national underpinnings...'¹¹

Thus it is because capital has become globally integrated and functions with the aid of the State, that any transitional program is forced to reckon with the fact that, today, seizing State power and the imposition of social democratic measures simply represses the State's function as a center for the exchange, extraction, and realization of value. So, it is for this reason, along with the repressive measures taken by parties like the PCI, that this 'molecular revolution' and its minor subjects are said to be 'anti-statist.' That is, it is no longer simply the proletariat who hold a privileged position within the circuit of value creation and capital accumulation. In light of the mutations undergone by capital at the beginning of the 1970's and into the 1980's, it is no longer simply the working-class who exist as potential partisans of revolution; in contrast to Asor Rosa's 'two societies' thesis, Guattari's molecular revolution maintains it to be the case that *anyone, anywhere*, can begin to take up the struggle for abolishing value as the social relation that dominates and exploits every dimension of public and private life. And what makes this a truly molecular understanding of revolution is not the democratization of the potentially revolutionary character to more and more positions within social life but rather its inclusion of the very elements society ignored, or placated; that is, the very same elements deemed by Asor Rosa to be nothing more than the lumpen strata eating away at authentic proletarian life, and unanimously demonized by union officials and PCI leadership alike. And perhaps it is due to the failures and betrayals of this Italian decade that we can read Guattari's words as both an homage to the victims of state repression as well as a restatement the *conspiratorial* communism at the heart of a molecular revolution: '*Conspiring means breathing together, and that is what we are being accused of; they want to stop us breathing, because we have refused to breathe deeply in their asphyxiating work-places [sic], in their individualist relationships, their families, their pulverizing houses. Yet, I plead guilty to assault – to an assault on the separation of life from desire, on sexism in inter-personal [sic] relations, on reducing life to a wage-packet.*'¹²

1. François Dosse, *Intersecting Lives*, tr. Deborah Glassman (Columbia University Press: New York, 2010), p. 284-291
2. *ATP*, 470.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Patrick Cuninghame, "Hot Autumn:" Italy's Factory Councils and Autonomous Workers' Assemblies, 1970s', *Ours to Master Ours to Own*, (), 324.
5. Patrick Cuninghame, "Hot Autumn:" Italy's Factory Councils and Autonomous Workers' Assemblies, 1970s', *Ours to Master Ours to Own*, (), 324.
6. *Ibid.*, 125.
7. *Ibid.*, 135.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Molecular Revolution*, p. 243.
10. Félix Guattari, 'Millions and Millions of Potential Alices', *Molecular Revolution*, 238
11. Felix Guattari, *Molecular Revolution*, transl. Rosemary Sheed (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1984), pp 242-47.
12. *Ibid.*, 239.

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